

Module	Contemporary Society and Political Systems
Course code	BAJH-CSPS
Credits	10 ECTS / 5 U.S. semester credits
Important Notes	Students should have completed a first year politics, media studies, or sociology type module to prepare them for this module.
Allocation of marks	60% continuous assessment 40% final examination

Module Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, the learner will be able to:

1. Engage in independent social and political research
2. Identify key social problems and tensions
3. Understand some of the key political systems domestically and internationally
4. Critically discuss contemporary social and economic issues
5. Develop critical judgements and analytical skills
6. Pursue further study and research in the social science field

Module Aims

This module aims to enable the learner to:

- Introduce learners to the working of contemporary society
- Enable learners to analyse key issues in social and political development

Module Objectives

The objectives of this module are to have learners:

- (1) Develop their thinking and analytical skills beyond the scope introduced in Understanding Society
- (2) Build a habit of independent reading and inquiry into complex societal issues, both in a domestic and international context.
- (3) Be able to compare and contrast different opinions, interpretations and theories on contemporary political issues
- (4) Begin to generate independent academic views on societal issues

Module Curriculum

- (1) **Change and continuity in the contemporary social order:** The world we live in is often described as 'post-industrial society', an 'information society' or as a 'knowledge

economy'. The module looks at the advantages and limitations of these terms, and attempt to develop a balanced assessment of the changes and continuities in the contemporary social order.

(2) A world of consumers: Contemporary society is often called a 'consumer society', but it is not always clear how consumption is different from earlier periods. The module looks at the role of advertising and media in promoting consumerism and also explores changing patterns of consumption, including the rising levels of debt which have come to underpin these new forms of consumption.

(3) Class in contemporary society: There are many indications that older class identities are breaking down, yet these changes in how people perceive themselves have been accompanied by a trend towards increased social inequality in North America and Western Europe with the wealthier sections of society becoming richer, while the least prosperous sections have lost ground. The module explores how classes and notions of class has evolved and explore how wider social changes impact on collective identities.

(4) Dynamics and limits of the contemporary social order: The module concludes by exploring the overall dynamics of this social order and asking whether it possesses structural (internal) or ecological limits to its operations.

(5) Food and Society

This topic examines the relationship between trends in food consumption and social, economic and other factors that drives these trends.

We analyse and discuss the impact marketing, media, economic, ethnic and other factors have on the food choices of the individual and society in general.

(6) Friendship and technology in contemporary society

Who are your friends? Is there an observable structure as to why people are friends? What impact is technology, communications technology in particular, and society having on friendship? In this topic we study how the definitions and conception of friendship have developed since the Greek philosophers like Aristotle examined the concepts of why friendship matters.

(7) Environmentalism

The issues of climate change, GM foods, renewable energy, public transport, protecting endangered species and tackling waste management are just some of environmental problems confronting society today.

We want to identify and analyse not just the core environmental questions but also to develop an understanding of green politics and environmental ideologies.

(8) Elections and electoral systems

Electoral democracy is considered a must for modern states and there are more elections and more people participating electorally than ever before globally. However, in established democracies like Ireland, Britain and the USA participation in elections by voters is falling, while in other states such as the USA very close elections have thrown the voting systems open to question. In the USA and other systems the amount of money spent by candidates has brought into question how fair and accessible electoral systems are.

We examine all of these issues in this topic while comparing and contrasting first past the post, PR List and PRSTV systems.